



# News Release

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## **Spoiled food can make you sick; handle, store food safely when power is out**

*Keep cold food cold to prevent bacteria from growing: if in doubt, throw it out*

**OLYMPIA** — When the power is out it's important to protect your food supply. Keeping foods cold or making sure they're fully cooked can protect you from foodborne illness. That can be difficult without power.

If you think power might be out for a long time, use food that can spoil fast before food that keeps longer. It's most important to keep meat, seafood, and dairy products cold.

Refrigerator doors should be kept closed as much as possible to keep cold air inside. Freezers that are part of a refrigerator-freezer combination will keep food frozen for up to a day. A free-standing chest or upright freezer will keep food frozen solid for two days if it is fully loaded. The more it is opened, the quicker it will thaw.

An ice chest packed with ice or snow is a good temporary solution. However, storing food outside is not recommended. Outside temperatures change often and the sun can thaw frozen foods or warm cold foods so that bacteria can grow. Animals can also contaminate food left outside.

Bags of ice or block ice from the store can be placed in the refrigerator to keep food cold. Also, many items that people often keep in their refrigerator can temporarily be stored on a countertop or in a cool place like a garage. Some examples include fresh uncut fruits and vegetables, butter and margarine, ketchup, mustard, pickles, relish and similar condiments.

When it comes to food safety, the general rule is, "If in doubt, throw it out." Never taste suspicious food. It may look and smell fine, but bacteria that cause foodborne illness may be present and could make you sick.

If food is cold to the touch, and you know it has not been above 45 degrees F for more than an hour or two, it's probably safe to keep, use, or refreeze. Throw away all meat, seafood, dairy products, or cooked foods that don't feel cold to the touch. Even under proper refrigeration, many raw foods should be kept only three or four days before they are cooked, frozen, or thrown away.

It is important to be very careful when trying to cook during a power outage. NEVER USE A CAMPING STOVE OR BARBEQUE INDOORS. They put off carbon monoxide, a poisonous gas that can't be seen or smelled. It can kill a person in minutes.

The state Department of Health has several fact sheets on [staying safe in bad weather](http://www.doh.wa.gov/Topics/weather.htm) (www.doh.wa.gov/Topics/weather.htm). They're available in multiple languages. The agency provides a wide range of [emergency preparedness information](http://www.doh.wa.gov/phepr/default.htm) (www.doh.wa.gov/phepr/default.htm) from earthquakes to windstorms. This information is in our [Emergency Resource Guide](http://www.doh.wa.gov/phepr/handbook.htm) (www.doh.wa.gov/phepr/handbook.htm).

The [Department of Health website](http://www.doh.wa.gov) (www.doh.wa.gov) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*. Also, [find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#).

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***Note:*** *The state Department of Health headquarters in Tumwater is closed today due to a power outage. Contact Tim Church or Donn Moyer by pager for media assistance.*